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COMMISSION ON THE NATIONAL
GUARD AND RESERVES

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

COMMISSION ON THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVES
ON
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Introduction

Chairman Punaro and distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about family readiness and the Navy Reserve Family Ombudsman Program, and I very much look forward to your questions.

Our Navy Reserve Sailors are busy every day supporting global combat and operational support missions, serving as Seabees in Iraq, civil affairs Sailors in Afghanistan, customs inspectors in Kuwait, logistical aircrew and Joint Task Force staff in the Horn of Africa, and as relief workers in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations at home and abroad. They have become integral to all Navy operations, from basic training to complex Fleet operations, in support of the Marine Corps and at every Joint Command.

Since our nation was attacked on 9/11, over 42,000 Navy REservists have been mobilized in support of Combatant Commanders' requirements, representing over 80% of the Navy Sailors deployed on the ground. On any given day, more than 20,000 RC Sailors are on some type of Active Duty (AD) or Inactive Duty (ID) orders fully integrated at their supported commands. They provide much appreciated operational support

with both their military and civilian skill sets and capabilities.

To ensure their readiness, we must continually address both Sailor and Family Readiness, and we recognize the inherent links between the two. We must always strive to provide the most effective and responsive service to enable families to be prepared for all aspects of pre-mobilization, deployment and post-mobilization periods.

Family Readiness

Family Readiness is a key enabler of Sailor Readiness, and Navy Reserve Force family programs are continually improving with the assistance of Command Ombudsmen and the Family Support Team.

One of our biggest challenges is the wide dispersion of RC families throughout the fifty states and four U.S. territories, often without convenient access to the services provided by Navy Fleet and Family Support Centers. To extend services to those deserving families, the Navy Reserve hired a full-time Family Support Program Manager on the Commander, Navy Reserve Forces Command (CNRFC) headquarters staff, and specific emphasis has been placed on partnering with National Guard Family Assistance Centers. Liaison and improved cooperation with other Reserve Components has greatly increased the availability and level of

support for all uniformed personnel and their families. The Family Support Program Manager routinely communicates with Navy Reserve Ombudsmen through various means including the newly developed Navy Reserve Family Information Newsletter.

A relatively new initiative is the Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee (ISFAC) concept. An ISFAC provides assistance to families of service members of both Active and Reserve Components from the closest military source, regardless of military service branch affiliation or geographic location. These committees coordinate the resources of the Department of Defense, United States Coast Guard, National Guard and respective Family Service Centers in time of mobilization, deployment, and/or disaster relief.

One common concern of families is the difficulty in obtaining military dependent identification (ID) Cards, which enables family members to access to critical services, especially medical benefits. Under current policy, when the service member is mobilized for more than 30 days, the dependent family member must acquire a new ID Card since the benefit entitlements change while the service member is on an extended period of active duty. This requirement can place undue burden on our families, particularly when they do not live in close proximity to a

military facility that can provide the necessary ID Card. It would be far less stressful on the family and far more cost effective and efficient to eliminate this requirement. The status of benefits could be changed in the master file database, potentially expediting the receipt of TRICARE medical and other services for family members.

Ombudsmen

Navy Reserve Ombudsmen are a vital link between the Sailors' commands and their families. They attend Ombudsman Basic Training to understand Navy programs and the importance of confidentiality when assisting families. They provide vital referral services, and ensure families have the information necessary to meet the challenges of military lifestyle. The Ombudsman helps Commanding Officers have a better understanding of the welfare of the command's families, and acts as a command representative focusing on effective communication.

Outreach

Informing Reservist families of the available benefits, entitlements and services is a major contributor to Sailor morale and is a key aspect in retention. Family Days are a vital link to our Navy families and serve as a valuable outreach tool. All Navy Operational Support Centers and many individual

units hold Family Days to provide "one stop shopping" of services and support for Sailors to get family issues in order. Services provided include administrative support to update dependency data, SGLI, family member ID Card processing, legal assistance (simple wills and powers of attorney), and presentations on Military OneSource, TRICARE, American Red Cross and several Veteran's Service Organizations. Family Days give Navy Reserve family members a more comprehensive understanding of their benefits and entitlements and serve as a venue where Ombudsmen are able to explain the Ombudsman program and educate families on the services they provide.

Internet websites easily enable Navy families to keep informed. Military OneSource provides a significant level of assistance for families, including counseling services when requested. In addition, a Navy Reserve Family Information webpage at <http://navyreserve.navy.mil> provides useful information and interactive communications for questions.

Summary

We have placed renewed emphasis on family support, especially as it relates to Sailor readiness. Through robust outreach and Ombudsman programs, Navy Reserve is constantly improving our medical, physical and family readiness while we provide the

necessary joint capabilities to meet emergent Fleet and COCOM requirements. Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, our Navy Reservists have answered the call to serve and REserve with immeasurable dedication and a complete focus on our critical missions. We will continue to enhance our Family support programs, and we thank the Commission for its efforts to improve the scope and quality of the benefits and services that they so clearly deserve.